Scientist Warning on Why you Should Consume Less; Even if Wider Society Doesn't

Peter M. Haswell

Abstract: Overconsumption presents a major obstacle to social and environmental sustainability. Systemic social, legal, and economic strategies are absolutely necessary, but individuals are still accountable for their lifestyle choices and associated environmental footprints. Anti-consumption (rejection, reduction, reclamation) has its limitations, but could contribute to pro-environmental change, helping resolve biodiversity and climate crises. Regardless of societal consumption patterns, individuals can still make great gains in well-being and personal development by upholding their environmental and social values, minimizing personal resource consumption. Challenging the cultural norms of overconsumption requires individuals to employ mental fortitude in attempts to act justly toward the entire community of life. As a species, given our rational capabilities and ability to meet our basic needs, we are highly capable of bettering ourselves and our environment.

Keywords: anti-consumption, biodiversity crisis, climate change, environmental ethics, individual behavior change, materialism, virtue, voluntary simplicity

First, tell yourself what you want to be, then act your part accordingly.
—Epictetus

Very little of the globe has escaped anthropogenic influence (Kareiva et al. 2007). The Anthropocene epoch signals an era in which much of the globe, its biological communities, and their behaviors have been substantially modified by human action (Bar-On et al. 2018; Tucker et al. 2018; Venter et al. 2016). Increases in human (and domestic animal) biomass have, broadly speaking, come at the cost of declines in biodiversity, trophic complexity, and the abundance of other species (Bar-On et al. 2018; Estes et al. 2011; Jackson et al. 2001). In recent years, scientists have engaged in urgent calls to action and fervent warnings about the biodiversity and climate crises (Dinerstein et al. 2017; Ripple et al. 2017; Wilson 2016). Drastic changes to our ethical outlook and legal systems have also been called for (Higgins et al. 2013; Treves et al. 2019). A global economic system dependent on growth

and associated overconsumption culture still, however, present major barriers to social and environmental sustainability (Pacheco et al. 2018; Wiedmann et al. 2020).

Diana Stuart and colleagues (2020) challenge the economic system and very culture that is largely culpable in driving environmental crises. The authors describe "overconsumption ideology" as excessive resource consumption promoted by the creation of false needs and the perception of consumption as the solution to increased happiness and social issues. Stimulated by media and advertising, they assert that overconsumption is driven by capitalist requirements of increasing consumption and consumers. The ideology culminates in the degradation of social and ecological well-being alongside hindering individual consciousness and the fair distribution of power and prosperity. A bleak picture is painted of powerless consumers tightly bound into servitude of the ideology and unwittingly, or begrudgingly, the ruling class. Stuart and colleagues (2020) suggest that relying on individuals to change their consumption habits ignores the fact that production in fact drives consumption. While I would not disagree with this, I would however suggest that peer-to-peer influence, cultural norms, base instincts, education, knowledge, critical thinking, and individual reflection are also undoubtedly integral to lifestyle choices. Externalities and macro-level factors can present strong drivers of behavior, but we must not entirely absolve ourselves of responsibility at the individual level.

Environmental damage is often a result of specific, or collective, individual actions and inactions. The Brundtland Report recognized the need for more affluent individuals to adopt lifestyles within the planet's ecological means (Brundtland Commission 1987). Societal affluence and personal expenditure are linked to greater resource use and ecological footprints (Lenzen and Murray 2001; Wiedmann et al. 2006; Wiedmann et al. 2015). Preventing overconsumption is thus integral to sustainability (Wiedmann et al. 2020). Stuart and colleagues (2020) assert that mass individual temperance is unlikely to occur anytime soon, but suggest that throughput could be reduced via degrowth strategies like economic democracy, work time reduction, advertising regulations, and universal basic income. Systemic social, legal, or economic strategies are necessary, but reform could still be driven by individuals. Motivated by environmental concerns, a society could feasibly establish anti-consumption as a collective cultural norm through enough individual acts of rejection, reduction, and reclamation. I caution that the potential utility of individual behavior change should not be dismissed, but should be encouraged as a complement to other pro-environmental strategies.

Commonly held notions of personal excellence and "the good life" in consumerist societies clearly need redefining (Hill 1983; Milbrath 1993). This requires individuals to challenge destructive cultural norms en masse. Individuals can educate themselves, instigate economically democratic businesses, choose to work less, consume less, divest to less damaging sources where they do consume or invest, build resilience to external influences, and support or initiate environmental causes and policies. Regardless of the likelihood of being joined by the rest of society and solving environmental crises, I also argue that individuals should still minimize their environmental impacts and personal resource consumption, both direct and indirect.

Lifestyle Change as a Contributory Solution to Environmental Crises

Is It Effective?

The World Scientists' second warning to humanity suggested divestment of monetary purchases and investments ("Step J") as a tool that might help achieve sustainability (Ripple et al. 2017). In theory, such an approach could encourage positive environmental change. Indeed, trends in consumer behavior, stock prices, shareholder proposals, and corporate social responsibility suggest a move toward, and an expectation, of greater environmental consciousness in recent decades (Flammer 2013). Stuart and colleagues (2020), however, highlight that increased consumption of less damaging products, will, for the most part, still be excessive consumption, fulfilling false needs. It is indeed pertinent to be on guard against logical fallacies and ineffective strategies (Gunderson 2020). No consumption, including more efficient vehicles, renewable energy, organic food, or recreation, for example, is entirely free of ecological impact, raw material, or space use. As such, without reductions in overall consumption, environmental degradation is likely to continue due to a "Jevons Paradox," where improvements in efficiency are outweighed by ever-increasing consumption (Alexander and Ussher 2012). While divestment has utility, minimizing consumption is essential and should precede it.

We still have much to learn regarding its effectiveness in driving corporate, institutional, and societal behavior, but environmentally orientated anti-consumption (EOA) has the potential to affect micro- (individuals), meso- (companies), and macro-level (society) practice

(García-de-Frutos et al. 2018). For example, based on the most effective nonregulatory interventions and behaviorally realistic adoption of available technologies in homes and nonbusiness travel, Thomas Dietz and colleagues (2009) suggested a reasonably achievable carbon emissions reduction of 7.4 percent in the United States. Such behavioral change does not present a one-stop panacea, but it certainly does not present a contributory method to be overlooked either, especially considering these predictions did not include "appreciable changes in lifestyle" (Dietz et al. 2009). In their review, Deirdre Shaw and Iain Black (2010) observed that "consumption as voting" can drive marketplace change and communicate citizens preferences, but found its direct ability to be limited by inconsistency, weakness, or lack of clarity in consumer behavior, as well as by market structure.

Consumers may be deluded into thinking they have sovereignty over purchasing choices, may be inhibited from accessing the information required to make appropriate choices, may not be suitably skilled or motivated, may lack suitable alternatives, may resort to products containing both desirable and undesirable characteristics, and, ultimately, can be manipulated into purchases (Korczynski and Ott 2004; Shaw and Black 2010; Shaw et al. 2006). As highlighted by Stuart and colleagues (2020), perceptions of needs and what constitutes essential goods and consumption can also become greatly distorted in consumerist cultures.

Humans are not passively subject to external forces, but in practice our actions are rarely independent of them either (Corsini et al. 2019). Reliance upon individual behavior change may accordingly be hindered by externalities. Radical changes in consumption patterns could be seen in response to self-reflected ethical values, but such results may require significant time and personal investment alongside training and education (Geiger et al. 2020; Stanszus et al. 2017). Stuart and colleagues (2020) may thus be correct in assuming that mass individual temperance is unlikely. Even so, if encouraged, facilitated, and enacted by enough individuals, anti-consumption could still complement or support other strategies as part of a holistic approach toward sustainability.

Is It a Distraction?

Stuart and colleagues (2020), citing David Hagmann and colleagues (2019), caution that reliance on consumer behavior presents a dangerous distraction that could impede support for more substantive mitigation methods. Parts of Hagmann and colleagues' (2019) study suggest that this may be true; however, when provided information regarding

a behavioral nudge approach's ineffectiveness at the time of decision, support for a more efficient policy measure (carbon tax) increased and crowding-out disappeared. They concluded that this finding does not diminish support for nudge approaches, and informing the public that these are not a substitute for more substantive policy could provide a means to benefit from multiple tools.

Personal environmental actions leading to the crowding out of support for more substantive policies as a result of inaccurate perceptions presents a real risk (Werfel 2017). Human decisions are nested in a history of behaviors, and there is, for example, a risk that virtuous personal acts can spillover into permitting unethical behaviors, but also the potential for them to promote further virtuous activity (Dolan and Galizzi 2015; Mazar and Zhong 2010). Paul Dolan and Matteo Galizzi (2015) suggest that through multiple mechanisms behavioral spillover from previous actions can further behaviors in the same direction, or result in behaviors that push back against them. Their review suggests that a much greater understanding of these ripple effects is required, but that high perception of initial behavioral costs and effort, alongside focusing on whichever is smaller in size between completed tasks and performance gaps, may help promote continuous virtuous behavior.

Elizabeth Shove calls to "shift the focus away from individual choice and to be explicit about the extent to which state and other actors configure the fabric and the texture of daily life" (2010: 1281). She argued that a focus on individual responsibility deflects attention from context-orchestrating institutions, infrastructures, governance, power structures, and practices that affect possible courses of action. As discussed above, external factors such as these can hinder the effectiveness of individual-based change. Shove (2010) further suggests that a shift in approach is unlikely unless a drastic shakeup enables the breaking through of policies that look beyond emphasis on individual choice. Such social movements and practice shakeups could of course be instigated, enhanced, or moved forward by the actions of particularly motivated individuals, such as can be seen in recent times with the likes of Greta Thunberg or Pauline "Polly" Higgins.

So where does this leave individual action? It is not without utility or potential, but is presently limited in effectiveness and does not cover processes in their entirety. It may be distracting for individuals and policy efforts, but it may also encourage progress in both arenas. Further investment in its study and practice to illicit substantial environmental change should probably proceed where beneficial, but not as a replacement for other promising strategies. That said, most people are

unlikely to be grossly involved in the implementation of change strategies beyond vote-casting. For most individuals, avoiding consumption may well present the most accessible and productive means they have to help the state of the earth's environment (Black 2010). Obstacles to dramatic environmental benefit have been discussed, but I now turn my attention toward why individuals may attempt to take more control of their own moral agency and engage in consuming less regardless.

Consuming Less Even If Wider Society Doesn't

Our actions are subject to sociality, common custom, and other external drivers such as available options and information, or our perceptions of them. I do not, however, think this means we must accept that individual autonomy in behavior does not exist, regardless of circumstance. Pro-environmental choices may in many contexts appear very hard, especially when traded off against other behaviors we view to be virtuous or where we feel we have restricted liberty. Numerous environmentally damaging behaviors are normalized in common practice. Many people are perhaps unaware or unreflective of underlying ethical considerations, especially where damage is realized far from our individual spheres of experience. Individuals must navigate their particular circumstances and make their actions accordingly, ideally contemplating ethical components and the extent of personal culpability. The concept of self-responsibility will no-doubt be unpalatable to many. Nobody will achieve perfection, but this is not the point: endeavoring to engage more in cultivating one's behavior and character is still of value in and of itself. Here, I propose why one might do this in relation to resource consumption and the environment.

Environmental Values

Humans can be considered a super predator with global ecological impact, an integral part of food webs, but also, importantly, the only species with the ability to make ethical judgments and purposeful choices based on an awareness of the outcomes (Lewis et al. 2017). From an anthropocentric viewpoint, most people presumably understand the value of tangible material goods provisioned by the environment. Consideration and understanding of nature's value has also been extended to a wide range of additional services (Blicharska et al. 2019; Cardinale et al. 2012). For example, supporting and regulatory services

(Cancio et al. 2016; Hofmeester et al. 2017), cultural, aesthetic, or intellectual stimulation value (Cafaro 2001), and psychological and social benefits (Dopko et al. 2019). Most nations acknowledge nature's vital contributions to people as well as humanities culpability in driving the global deterioration of biodiversity, ecosystem functions, and services (Cardinale et al. 2012; Díaz et al. 2019). Concern and calls to action have been raised over unsustainable human activity, both due to the realization of consequences for our own prosperity but also for that of future generations (Feinberg 1974; Ripple et al. 2017). If we hurt nature, then we hurt ourselves (Krishnamurti 2006 [1983]).

Beyond sustainability and intergenerational concerns, environmental damage also has huge implications for current social justice. The costs and benefits of environmental damage are unfairly distributed, with most burdens and the least reimbursement often affecting the already disadvantaged (Shue 1999). Development and economic growth are often proposed as means to tackle social problems, yet further social and environmental degradation is generally incurred because of systemic issues with the inequitable distribution of wealth and consumption of natural resources (Rolston 1996). Materialistic values favor self-centeredness and narcissism, hindering concern for social as well as environmental issues (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Kasser 2002; Lee and Ahn 2016). While associated with self-gratification, materialism is also, but perhaps more strongly, associated with power and dominance over the physical world (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002). Dominance over nature is much akin to, and likely associated with, the oppression of subsets of humanity (Hessler and Willott 2002). It is clear that overconsumption also contributes to unjust power structures and much human suffering.

Many consider it ethical to avoid harming the environment and/or individual animals, biodiversity, and ecological or evolutionary processes in all their complexity (Hill 1983; James 2006; Soulé 1985). It is, however, worth noting that these desires may sometimes conflict with one another (Driscoll and Watson 2019; Griffin et al. 2020; Sagoff 1984). Environmental damage could also be considered morally wrong if one perceives nonhuman entities to have intrinsic value, regardless of their benefit to humans (Callicott 2002). Aldo Leopold's (1949) "land ethic," for example, suggested extending moral consideration to nonhuman organisms and, in fact, all components of an ecosystem (soil, water, plants, etc.). To varying degrees, many have acknowledged inherent rights for sentient beings (Schmidtz 1998; Singer 1974). Others have acknowledged the interests of all life, and, in more recent times,

recommended or even awarded legal rights to ecosystems and nature more broadly (Chapron et al. 2019; Feinberg 1974; Stone 1972).

Establishing one's exact values and duties toward the natural world is complex (Rolston 1991). Concepts of a duty of care toward land and the natural world are, however, deep-rooted, with the destructive license consumerist societies grant themselves being a relatively modern phenomenon (Midgley 1983). Social and environmental duty concepts, such as those demonstrated by the Māori *kaitiakitanga* or stewardship ethic, could clearly go a long way to assisting social and environmental progress (Spiller et al. 2011). Some would further argue that due consideration of multispecies and multigenerational interests is also a matter of justice (Treves et al. 2019).

Most individuals in developed nations will likely care about the environment for at least one of the aforementioned reasons, and be capable of taking individual action. Knowingly contributing to environmental damage when avoidable can clearly be considered a signifier of poor personal character and an inability to uphold one's alleged values. As such, individuals might ideally reprioritize integrity, placing their environmental (and social) values, and the virtue of upholding them, above unnecessary consumption. By doing so, one might inspire others through personal example, especially if one is making environmental recommendations or is in an influential position (Gardner and Wordley 2019; Goymann and Küblbeck 2020). One might also make great gains in personal growth and well-being.

Virtue, Purpose, and Well-Being

Many religions espouse support for what they believe to be virtuous behavior and moral integrity. Assuming, however, one does not commit to a two-world theory of reward for "good" behavior after death, they must bravely face the apparent meaninglessness of existence, attempting to find their own meaning and value in this world (Camus 1942 [1979]; Nietzsche 1883–1885 [1999]). Our lives and actions need not be without purpose, providing we choose to attribute it to them. In attributing purpose, and ensuring well-being, we can find some existential insight from those who contemplated their mortality, reflected on the relative insignificance of their own existence and desires in the grand scheme of time and space, and promoted virtuous behavior as an end in itself. Specifically, we can consider whether anti-consumption and voluntary simplicity can contribute to feeling purposeful and contented.

Liberation from suffering, through the moral freedom and capacity for virtuous behavior that follows emancipation from materialistic or situational desires, is no new concept. The values of Diogenes the Cynic perhaps best epitomize a strict version of such thought, where restrictive social norms and amenities were rejected in favor of virtue and voluntary simplicity (Epictetus n.d. [2008]; Russell 1947). Diogenes reportedly believed civilization's luxuries to be out of touch with man's real nature, often highlighted the triviality of common pursuits or concerns, and, interestingly, declared brotherhood with the entire human race as well as animals (Russell 1947).

The Stoics, like the Cynics, asked how one might be virtuous and happy in a wicked world full of suffering. Both schools acknowledged the futility in basing happiness upon externalities that are outside of one's absolute control (power, wealth, goods, etc.), instead placing utmost importance upon moral character and power of mind, which they believed could not be controlled by external forces (Epictetus n.d. [2008]; Russell 1947). Decisions and actions are clearly influenced by externalities, but Epictetus (n.d. [2008]) proclaimed that "of free will there can be neither thief nor tyrant." The Stoics recognized that the aptitude for complete rejection of externally derived pleasure and amenities was likely rare, and perhaps unnecessary. They generally accepted prosperity that befell them, yet sought to free themselves from fear by practicing indifference to things controlled by events outside their influence, neither chasing externalities nor dreading or indulging displeasure from their loss or absence (Aurelius n.d. [2006]; Epictetus n.d. [2008]; Seneca n.d. [1969]).

The mildly hedonistic school of thought, Epicureanism, may also offer insight into overconsumption and well-being. While proclaiming that one should pursue pleasure, Epicureanism promoted this by means of freedom from psychological and bodily pain. Epicureans orientated their focus toward the basic life necessities, and discouraged overindulgence in necessary actions (e.g., overeating) or the pursuit of what they deemed to be unnatural, unquenchable desires, such as power and wealth (Russell 1947). Epicureanism, much like Cynicism, Stoicism, and also Buddhism, admired temperance and believed that chasing externalities brought discomfort, yet differed by more highly valuing the pursuit of simple, and somewhat readily obtainable, pleasures (Lai 2008; Macaro 2018; Russell 1947).

We find support for these observations in modern consumer research. There can be substantial deleterious costs to the pursuit of wealth as a central life aspiration (Kasser and Ryan 1993). Once basic

needs are met, focus on material acquisition, like focus on other externalities, can have a range of negative effects for psychological and physical health (Kasser 2002; Lee and Ahn 2016). Focusing on extrinsic sources of happiness can detract from activities and experiences that actually lead to happiness (Oral and Thurner 2019). More broadly, emotional and psychological well-being, as well as social relationships, self-actualization, connectedness to nature, and a sense of purpose in life, are all hindered by excessive consumption and its pursuit (Alexander and Ussher 2012; Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Kashdan and Breen 2007). The personal costs of materialism and overconsumption, like the environmental and social costs, thus seem substantial. Low desire for externalities and a focus on intrinsic sources of happiness, however, can lead to higher levels of well-being (Oral and Thurner 2019).

Low-consumption lifestyles can benefit environmental and social conditions, but are also likely to be less time-poor, leaving more opportunity for intrinsic fulfillment (Alexander and Ussher 2012). Individuation (understanding and enacting a living co-operation of one's united psyche) and self-actualization (fulfilling one's potential) are likely to be psychologically important (Jung 1966 [2014]; Maslow 1943, 1968 [2012]). The pursuit of personal excellence, virtue, or fulfillment is often considered a most suitable life purpose (Aristotle n.d. [2009]; Nietzsche 1883–1885 [1999]; Seneca n.d. [1969]). A well-lived life and accompanying characteristics such as courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance, alongside self-sufficiency, have been admired and considered to be of intrinsic value by a variety of thinkers (Epictetus n.d. [2008]; Plato n.d. [2007]; Thoreau 1854, 1849 [1986]. Interpretation is of course subjective, but many of the aforementioned virtues are identifiable with low-consumption lifestyles. Given the potential for personal development, and that many of the above-discussed environmental values may also be widely held, it seems plausible that many may find more purpose and contentment in simpler, environmentally virtuous, inwardly focused lifestyles, than in externally focused, high-consumption lifestyles.

Practical Considerations

In part, some of the psychological tension associated with consumerism may be a function of conflict between competing values, those without prosocial values may appear to suffer less, but individuals may also optimize well-being by balancing consumption and anti-consumption (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Kuanr et al. 2020). This may well

explain why we rarely see environmental or other virtue values dominating consumer behavior, particularly where overconsumption is so strongly reinforced. For example, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the public that "people should shop, and shop with confidence" amid the coronavirus pandemic (BBC 2020). In those who believe possessions bring happiness, anti-consumption itself can even be motivated by long-term material aspirations (Nepomuceno and Laroche 2017). Compromise with, or loss of, consumer desires thus appears necessary to engage in stress-free environmentally orientated anti-consumption. That said, a small amount of stress seems vastly outweighed by the potential personal, societal, and environmental gains.

Arguably, to make environmentally beneficial lifestyle choices, individuals first need to be free of basic survival concerns and affluent enough to do so. Given opportunity and access, however, socioeconomically deprived communities can manage natural resources sustainably, providing social and environmental benefit (Rao 2002). Access to knowledge and education, particularly critical thinking, likely also play a key role in informed decision-making (Oxman et al. 2019). In developed countries, education and poverty should not provide barriers, but access, wealth to living cost ratios, and educational inequalities may still provide obstacles for some. Individual capabilities in cognitive reflection may affect logical, probabilistic, causal, and moral reasoning, as well as scientific understanding (Young and Shtulman 2020). Ability to overcome overconsumption ideology and inclination toward environmentally orientated anti-consumption may consequently be highly subjective. Individuals may, however, be able to learn to question intuitive ideas or evidence sources, and thereby evaluate information more critically (Oxman et al. 2019; Young and Shtulman 2020).

Many people likely fail to slow down from chasing the prescribed "good life" long enough to engage in contemplation or personal development. Concepts such as meditation and mindfulness may be gaining popularity as a means to meet employment pressures and external aspirations (e.g., status and wealth), but this represents somewhat of a hijacking from their traditional, inwardly focused, philosophical schools, Buddhism and Stoicism (Macaro 2018). Where employed with sustainable intentions, long-term practice, alongside the furthering of environmental knowledge, may be required to successfully change consumption behavior (Stanszus et al. 2017).

Readily available social media, audiovisual resources, and leisure entertainment mean that one need never be alone, think too deeply, or be free from external influences, distractions, and advertisements.

Although challenging, it is up to the individual to avoid following common culture and submitting to external influences thoughtlessly. Social cohesion is important, but too much cultural influence can result in psychological injury because external influences can hinder a person thinking for, and becoming, themselves (Jung 1966 [2014]). Once one has engaged in contemplation, and settled on their own course of action or virtue, they may still need to go against common thought and competing desires in order to pursue it (Nietzsche 1883–1885 [1999], 1887 [2006]). Living one's environmental virtues, or indeed any philosophy, thus requires integrity, self-discipline, and self-efficacy.

Abhisek Kuanr and colleagues recognize that "self-efficacy provides the necessary persistence to sustain voluntary simplicity beyond the initial trial" (2020: 272), but also suggest that businesses seeking a competitive advantage should use context-tailored "anti-consumption mitigation strategy" and communications "that assimilate sustainability with consumption and status themes" (2020: 273). Products need to be made more sustainably, but improvements can still be outweighed by increased consumption (Alexander and Ussher 2012; Stuart et al. 2020). Those wishing to truly minimize their environmental footprints will need to guard against overconsumption traps. Where purchases are necessary or justifiable to their conscience, consumers must also be cautious of false virtue signaling and greenwashed products (Gray et al. 2020).

Sustainable resource use, environmental mitigation, and restoration require rational evaluation, the accumulation of suitable knowledge, and the contemplation of goals and motivations. Nature conservation is often complex, and establishing suitable goals is no simple affair (Hayward 2009). Even seemingly "good" actions, such as planting trees, might actually run counterintuitive to climate or biodiversity goals without suitable knowledge, consideration, and application (Heilmayr et al. 2020; Hong et al. 2020). Emotions and perceptions can be important drivers of attitudes toward nature (Castillo-Huitrón et al. 2020). Empathy and compassion for nonhuman life may motivate conservation efforts, but they can also present conflicts of interest between competing goals (Griffin et al. 2020; Hayward et al. 2019; Wallach et al. 2020). Ethical dilemmas are common and can leave moral residue in the form of grief (Batavia et al. 2020). While difficult, flexibility in moral attention and case-specific consideration of competing claims may often be required to ensure that justice is upheld, as far as possible, for the entire community of life (Santiago-Ávila and Lynn 2020). Living decently in relation to the environment is likely to require a sophisticated moral pluralism that draws upon and reconciles multiple ethical theories (Brennan 1992).

Preventing overconsumption can reduce the regularity of such complex negotiations, but meeting one's remaining resource uses in a broadly just manor will not be without effort.

Conclusion

Overconsumption poses a huge hurdle for sustainability, and for individual well-being. Context can strongly influence behavior, and individual behavior change has its obstacles as a contributory solution to environmental problems. The creation of practices and structures that facilitate more pro-environmental behavior at the individual, institutional, and societal levels are required. Within the circumstances we find ourselves, however, each individual is still responsible for how they choose to live their lives. We must acknowledge that while we have the capability to rationalize our decisions and ethically consider other parties (other people, future generations, and nature) and the equity of our resource use, we could engage it far more. In accordance with our values, we could all act more virtuously. Rather than avoiding reflection, or creating justifications and fictions of our activity to match our consumerist cultural norms, we might reduce environmental impact and improve our well-being and personal development through less-consumptive lifestyles. We should contemplate and question overconsumption, endeavoring to develop the courage, wisdom, and integrity to pursue a more just and meaningful existence. If all were to value their virtue more highly, avoiding its cheap sale, then we might find ourselves in a very different condition, individually, societally, and environmentally.

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Peter M. Haswell, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Scholar at the University of California, Davis, a member of the Ronin Institute and an advisory member of the coexistence council for the International Wildlife Coexistence Network. He is an interdisciplinary scientist, focusing on wildlife research and conservation. Through a behavioral-ecological lens, his work examines interspecific interactions, ecosystem services, anthropogenic disturbance, and conflict resolution. He also considers environmental philosophy, particularly ethics, of great importance. Email: peter.haswell@ronininstitute.org

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